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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

[1](#)1. Israeli Politics

[1](#)2. Mideast

Key stories in the media:

The Jerusalem Post quoted top advisers to PM-designate Benjamin Netanyahu as saying yesterday that he is expected to lobby Secretary of State Hillary Clinton next week against U.S. recognition of a

possible Palestinian unity government that would include Hamas. The newspaper quoted Zalman Shoval, one of Netanyahu's five primary foreign policy advisers, as saying: "We shall try to convince our American friends that this is not something that would help the peace process, and that it would only make it easier for all sorts of other players -- the Europeans and the Russians -- to deal with Hamas. To return Hamas as a partner is not what America is interested in." The Jerusalem Post quoted another adviser to Netanyahu as saying that Israel does not want to strengthen Hamas, but at the same time it wants to find a mechanism whereby assistance could be provided to the civilian population of Gaza. This, the adviser said, was likely to be the focus of talks over the next few days with both U.S. Middle East special envoy George Mitchell, whom Netanyahu will meet shortly after his arrival today, and Clinton, who will arrive Monday.

Yediot reported that PM Ehud Olmert is intensifying Israel's efforts to release Gilad Shalit. The daily reported that Ofer Dekel, the PM's point man on the issue, will visit Cairo today and present Egyptian officials with new Israeli ideas. Maariv quoted Egyptian FM Ahmed Abu al-Gheit as saying yesterday that calm is prevailing in effect between Israel and Hamas. In an interview with Channel 2-TV last night, Olmert assessed that the chances of releasing Shalit were greater now than under the incoming Netanyahu-led government. In the interview, Olmert also said that he was close to a meeting with Syrian FM Walid Muallem. Maariv quoted Olmert as saying yesterday at a farewell event organized by the Manufacturers Association of Israel that he came very close to reaching peace with the Palestinians.

This morning Israel Radio reported that former foreign ministers from various Western countries, including Israel's Shlomo Ben-Ami, urged Israel to talk to Hamas.

Haaretz and other media reported that Avigdor Lieberman will demand that his Yisrael Beiteinu party be granted authority to choose the justice minister in the incoming government in order to appoint Daniel Friedmann, who currently occupies the position. Haaretz quoted senior Likud officials as saying that Lieberman raised the issue in talks with Netanyahu, who did not offer immediate opposition. Haaretz reported that, if Netanyahu is forced to form a narrow right-wing government -- as appears likely in light of Kadima chief Tzipi Livni's stated intention of leading the opposition instead of joining a Likud-led coalition -- he will have no choice but to accede to Lieberman's demand, even though he is under criminal investigation for alleged financial improprieties. Israel Hayom quoted senior Labor Party members as saying that party Chairman Ehud Barak is still considering joining Netanyahu's governing coalition. Speaking on Israel Radio this morning, Labor MK Shelly Yacimovich ruled out this possibility.

All media quoted PM Ehud Barak as saying yesterday, responding to news that Iran's nuclear reactor at Bushehr has become operational: "Time flies. It's slipping through our fingers. Even if the [U.S.] administration decides to engage in dialogue, such dialogue must be brief and limited in time." As to the possibility that Israel may take action against Iran, Barak said: "At the moment what is needed is sanctions, but Israel does not rule out any option and recommends that others not rule out any option as well. We mean what we say." The Jerusalem Post quotes senior Israeli defense officials as saying yesterday that the activation of the Bushehr reactor demonstrates the international community's failure to stop the Islamic Republic and the possibility that it will obtain a nuclear weapon.

Haaretz reported that the 2008 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, issued by the State Department yesterday, found that Israel harms human rights in the territories. The Israel chapter also cites the public debate on the transfer of Arabs and pronouncements by Avigdor Lieberman.

The Jerusalem Post quoted a senior Hamas official as saying in Cairo that Hamas and Fatah agreed yesterday to exchange prisoners as part of a deal still being negotiated to reconcile the feuding groups.

The media reported that yesterday morning, two rockets landed in open fields in southern Israel. The IAF retaliated by striking smuggling tunnels along the Philadelphi Corridor. Two other rockets were launched today -- one of them hitting a house in Sderot.

All media reported that PM Olmert will return Maj. Gen. (res.) Amos Gilad, who heads the diplomatic security bureau of the Defense Ministry, to his post as envoy to talks being held in Egypt over a Gaza cease-fire. Olmert will also withdraw the complaint he filed with the Civil Service Commission against Gilad. Gilad personally apologized to Olmert yesterday, saying he regretted his criticism of Olmert in Maariv a week ago. Today Israel Radio quoted a small group of families of terror victims as saying that they oppose letting Amos Gilad Q who they say is QsoftQ on issues concerning Hamas and Hizbullah -- return to his position.

HaQaretz reported that the Iranian Revolutionary Guards have been increasing their involvement and control over HizbullahQs operations since terror operations head Imad Mughniyah was killed a year ago. Maariv ran a feature on IranQs intensifying involvement in eastern African countries -Q Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan, Somalia, Kenya, and Djibouti.

HaQaretz reported that Israel's Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) recently intensified its attacks on the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Dr. Mohamed ElBaradei, for failing Qin his attempts to persuade Syria to allow visits by IAEA inspectors to three sites in Syria with suspected links to Syria's confidential nuclear program" and being soft on Iran. Presumably, the attacks are coming due to the report that ElBaradei will leave his position at the end of the year and be replaced by a new director, with representatives from South Africa and Japan vying for the spot.

Citing the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, The Jerusalem Post reported that Charles QChasQ Freeman, whom President Obama intends to appoint chair of the National Intelligence Council, had peddled a Saudi-funded, anti-Israel textbook.

Leading media reported that Turkish President Abdullah Gul is interested in making an official visit to Israel in the coming months to put an end to the crisis in relations between his country and Israel.

The Jerusalem Post reported that yesterday Israel thanked Cyprus for confiscating Iranian arms on their way to Gaza.

The Jerusalem Post reported that the Attorney GeneralQs office rejected a plea that Israel establish an external apparatus to investigate deaths and civilian injuries caused during Operation Cast Lead.

Leading media reported that Steven J. Rosen and Keith Weissman, former pro-Israel lobbyists accused of illegally disclosing national defense secrets, scored an important victory ahead of their April trial when a federal appeals court ruled Tuesday that they can use some classified information at their trial.

Morton Klein, the national (U.S.) president of the conservative Zionist Organization of America, was quoted as saying in an interview earlier this month with The Jerusalem Post that American Jews are beginning to realize that peace isnQt as imminent as they had previously thought.

The Jerusalem Post reported that yesterday the leaders of reform Jewry in North America urged the Los Angeles-based Simon Wiesenthal Center to relocate its planned Museum of Tolerance in Jerusalem to an alternative location in the city due to the location of a Muslim cemetery on a section of the planned construction site. The condemnation by the liberal stream of Judaism came three months after the High Court of Justice approved the central Jerusalem site of the \$250 million museum site.

HaQaretz quoted senior Kremlin officials as saying that business tycoon Arkady Gaidamak lodged a request yesterday to reinstate his Russian citizenship. He reportedly hopes that this action will complicate a potential extradition to France, where he is being tried in absentia over his involvement in the QAngolagate arms-dealing affair.

Maariv reported that immigration figures for 2008 were the worst

since the establishment of Israel.

11. Israeli Politics:

Summary:

Senior op-ed writer Akiva Eldar commented in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: QIn democracies, situations arise in which a real leader serves the nation's interests from the opposition. This is one of those times.

Columnist Ari Shavit, whose article opposing Tzipi Livni was the most talked about of the election campaign, wrote in Ha'aretz: Q[Tzipi] Livni's decision to thwart a national emergency government is no longer just a failure; it is a patently immoral decision that endangers Israel's future.

Block Quotes:

11. "Pursuing Peace from the Opposition"

Senior op-ed writer Akiva Eldar commented in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (2/26): QWhether [Tzipi] Livni and her fellow Kadima members like it or not, struggling as they are to set aside the reins of government, she is a leader of the peace camp. Elections for the 18th Knesset returned the right to power and sent that camp into the opposition. From there Livni can continue talks with Palestinian representatives, even about Jerusalem, without fear of [Shas leader] Eli Yishai's taking apart the government as a result. If it is indeed in her power to build a bridge between the two sides, she should seek to draft a final-status agreement. That is the only way to rescue hopes of peace and turn the next elections into a referendum on Israel's future as a Jewish democratic state. Who knows, maybe that's also the way to energize Netanyahu: Ariel Sharon said that the Gaza disengagement was a response to Yossi Beilin's Geneva Initiative. In democracies, situations arise in which a real leader serves the nation's interests from the opposition. This is one of those times.

II. "Unity before Calamity"

Columnist Ari Shavit, whose article opposing Tzipi Livni was the most talked about of the election campaign, wrote in Ha'aretz (2/26): QEven if Iran does not use its nuclear weapons, the fact that it has such weapons will change the world. A world with a third of its energy resources under Iranian patronage is a different world. A world subjected to the caprices of a nuclear Middle East is a different world. If by the summer of 2010 Iran is a nuclear power, that will destroy any chances of peace.... The insufferable dilemma is between the bomb, or to bomb. Both possibilities are disastrous. Israel has only a few months to formulate a third possibility, but to wake the world up at the last minute and convince the Obama administration, Israel needs a sane government. Israel needs a national unity government. For the last three years Tzipi Livni has been foreign minister. During this precious time she did not do a single substantive thing to stop the centrifuges of Natanz. Livni's failure vis-a-vis Iran is so much more serious than Golda's before the Yom Kippur War. But Livni's decision to thwart a national emergency government is no longer just a failure; it is a patently immoral decision that endangers Israel's future. Kadima must immediately reverse the irresponsible decision. History will never forgive any Israeli who stood in the way at this time of truth.

12. Mideast:

Summary:

The independent, left-leaning HaQaretz editorialized: QOutgoing Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Defense Minister Ehud Barak must immediately order the opening of the crossings to enable the orderly, constant entry of essential products into Gaza.

Columnist Gideon Eshet ironically wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: QIf Netanyahu is unhappy about the existing situation and rejects two states, the needed creativity leads to one state for two peoples -Q unless we believe in apartheid as the preferred system.

Block Quotes:

I. "Pasta Is Not a Weapon"

The independent, left-leaning HaQaretz editorialized (2/26): QIsrael's legitimate struggle against Hamas does not gain credence from the fact that the Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, John Kerry, discovered during his visit to Gaza that trucks loaded with bags of pasta are not being permitted to enter the Strip because Israel is letting in only rice. The result is that Hamas has chalked up points to its credit in the struggle for world public opinion. The closing of the border crossings has so far not opened the way for Gilad Shalit to be returned and there is not an iota of evidence that tightening the closure will advance his release by Hamas. It is superfluous to wait for the worsening of the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and for additional pressure from outside. Outgoing Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Defense Minister Ehud Barak must immediately order the opening of the crossings to enable the orderly, constant entry of essential products into Gaza.

II. "One State for Three Peoples"

Columnist Gideon Eshet ironically wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (2/26): QExamining possible politics in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, three options can be perceived. The first one -Q maintaining the status quo. WhatQs bad about this? We have been ruling the territories for over 40 years, so why not another 40 years? How many Israel-hating left-wing people and goys will say that this is apartheid? We know that this is all that is needed to ensure the security of Israel and its residents. The second option lies in Labor-Kadima-MeretzQs Qtwo statesQ Q- a Qnon-creativeQ option because of the structure of the [governing] coalition and mainly because thereQs no real partner. Netanyahu doesnQt want to try something that has no chance. The third one can be found in the cellar of LikudQs HQ -Q one state for two peoples. The original version talks about three people: the Jewish one, the Palestinian one, and the Jordanian one Q- all under one rule.... If Netanyahu is unhappy about the existing situation and rejects two states, the needed creativity leads to one state for two peoples - unless we believe in apartheid as the preferred system.

CUNNINGHAM